CROSS-DEVICE SHARING OF REMINDERS

FIELD OF INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to an electronic program guide system and a method therefor. More particularly it relates to an electronic program guide system and a method for notification of programs to a friend or other persons.

BACKGROUND

Many magazines, newspapers, and other publications have built their readership around the growing market of television (TV) viewers, who desire TV program information. Many cable TV networks have even designated a TV channel for providing the date, time and channel, at which TV programs will be presented.

An expedient presentation of TV program information is obtained by an electronic program guide (EPG). In an EPG it is possible to browse, in a simple manner, a multitude of programs provided from a multitude of TV channels.

An electronic program guide is an application provided in an apparatus such as an integrated receiver decoder (IRD), a set-top box (STB), or television receiver, designed to aid a viewer in the navigation of and selection from broadcast services in a digital television system. By means of the EPG it is possible to control the functionality of the apparatus, such as tuning to, or scheduling a recording of a specific service. It is also possible to register reminders and planned recordings as well as to filter the large amount of information available through the EPG. It is even possible to create a "virtual" channel comprising programs

from different channels, as is described in the international publication WO 0040028.

A program recording system allowing a user of an interactive viewing system, such as EPG, to record a selected program or to set a reminder for a selected program is described in the patent document US 5805763.

A drawback with a reminder/recording system as described in US 5805763 or WO 0040028 is that if a user would like to inform a friend or other persons of an interesting program, he needs to remember or note down characteristic reminding/recording details for that program and give those details to the friend, who also has to remember or note down characteristic reminding/recording details.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide an electronic program guide system that overcomes the above-mentioned drawback.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a method that overcomes the above-mentioned drawback.

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a computer program product that overcomes the above-mentioned drawback.

These objects, among others, are according to the present invention attained by systems, methods and computer program products, respectively, as defined in the appended claims.

By providing an electronic program guide system, comprising: receiving means for receiving at least one electronic program guide corresponding to a broadcast program; selecting means for selecting a desired program from said

electronic program guide; notification means for creating a notification for the program selected from said electronic program guide; communication means for access to a communications network; transmission means for transmitting a notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide to at least one remote electronic program guide system using said communications network; and reception means for receiving a notification from a remote electronic program guide system, a friend may be notified of an interesting program without having to remember or note down characteristic reminding/recording details for that program.

By providing a method for providing notifications of a program selected from an electronic program guide system comprising the steps of: browsing the electronic program guide for identification of a program of interest; selecting a desired program from said electronic program guide; creating a notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide; transmitting the notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide to at least one remote electronic program guide system, a friend may be notified of an interesting program without having to remember or note down characteristic reminding/recording details for that program.

By providing a computer program product stored on a computer readable storage medium, comprising computer readable program code means for causing a computer to perform the following steps: providing an electronic program guide for identification of a program of interest; providing selection options for a desired program from said electronic program guide; creating a notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide; and obtaining transmission of

the notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide to at least one remote electronic program guide system, the method is easily implemented in an electronic program guide system as described above.

By providing a computer program directly loadable into the internal memory of a digital computer comprising software code portions for performing the following steps when said product is run on a computer: providing an electronic program guide for identification of a program of interest; providing selection options for a desired program from said electronic program guide; creating a notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide; and obtaining transmission of the notification of the program selected from said electronic program guide to at least one remote electronic program guide system, the method is easily implemented in a multimedia system as described above.

Further features and advantages of the present invention will be evident from the following description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description of preferred embodiment given below and the accompanying figures, which are given by way of illustration only, and thus, are not limitative of the present invention, wherein:

Fig. 1 schematically shows a multimedia system according to the present invention;

Fig. 2 shows a flow chart for transmission of a notification according to the present invention; and

Figs. 3a and 3b show a flow chart, split into two pages, for managing reception of a notification according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

In the following description, for purpose of explanation and not limitation, specific details are set forth, such as particular techniques and applications in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will be apparent for a person skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced in other embodiments that depart from these specific details. In other instances, detailed description of well-known methods and apparatuses are omitted so as not to obscure the description of the present invention with unnecessary details.

A first embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to Figs. 1-3.

A multimedia system, as shown in Fig. 1, comprises an electronic program guide system 1 e.g. incorporated in an integrated receiver decoder, a user input means 2, such as a remote control, and a display device 3, such as a TV set. The electronic program guide system 1 comprises a receiving means 4, such as a tuner/receiver, a recording device 5, such as a hard disk, an electronic program guide (EPG) memory 6, and a control device 7 including a communications means, such as a network modem.

The electronic program guide system 1 is controlled by the remote control 2. The remote control 2 may further control the TV set 3.

The tuner/receiver 4 receives broadcast programs, e.g. broadcast via cable, terrestrial or satellite, which

programs may be watched on the TV set 3 and/or recorded on the hard disk 5. The tuner/receiver 4 further receives updates for the EPG, which are transferred to the EPG memory 6, regularly or upon request.

Referring to Fig. 2, the EPG displays available programs from available TV channels or own compositions, i.e. virtual channels, on the TV set 3. The EPG is browsed 8 to find a program of interest, which program then is selected 9. The selected program may be personally used 10, such as displayed on the TV set 3 or recorded on the hard disk 5. It is further possible to set a reminder that displays a message on the TV set 3 at a predetermined time, e.g. a couple of minutes, before the program starts or sends an alert message, in the form of an SMS (SMS, short message service), to a mobile telephone a predetermined time, e.g. at least ten minutes, before the program starts. An alert message is of small size and easily fit into an SMS. A reminder may alternatively be sent both to the TV 3 and to a mobile telephone (not shown).

A notification of the selected program in the EPG may alternatively 11 be transmitted to one or more persons, such as a friend or a multitude of friends, i.e. to their respective electronic program guide system. The friend or friends that the user want to notify are selected 12, either in response to a message displayed on the TV set 3 or by activation of a dedicated button. If the user wants to recommend recording 13 a recoding flag is set 14 in the notification. If the user also wants to recommend reminder 15 a reminder flag is set 16 in the notification. When the user does not want to recommend recording 13 at least the reminder flag is set 16, i.e. when recommend recording 15 is dropped a reminder flag is set 16. Further, if the user

wants to send an alert message 17 to the friend or friends an alert flag is set 18 in the notification.

The notification is thereafter coded and transmitted 19, by the network modem of the control device 7, to the electronic program guide system(s) of the friend(s). The transfer of the notification is accomplished with a particular protocol that conforms to TCP/IP (TCP/IP, transmission control protocol/internet protocol). Thus, the notification contains indications for a reminder to a program, a record instruction for a program, or both a reminder and a record instruction for a program, and optionally an alert message.

The control device 7 of the electronic program guide system 1 further includes reception means, such as a filter. The filter is set to pass only notifications from certain friends, authorized by e.g. a certificate. Different friends may have different access levels, defined by the authorization.

Referring to Figs. 3a and 3b, a notification is received 20 in the electronic program guide system 1 by the network modem of the control device 7 and decoded. If the notification is not from an authorized friend 21 it is discarded 22. If the notification is authorized it is checked 23 if it contains a mobile alert flag set. When an alert flag is set it is checked 24 if the friend is authorized to send an alert message to a mobile phone of the user. If so, an alert message is sent 25 to the mobile phone by SMS as described above. If not, and also if no mobile alert flag is set, it is checked 26 if a recording flag is set. When a recording flag is set it is checked 27 if the friend is authorized to register a recording. If the friend is authorized, the recording is registered in the EPG memory 6. This may be valuable when the user is away from home,

e.g. on holiday, to allow a friend to look after interesting programs. If the present recording registration is in conflict with a previous recording instruction the previous recording instruction is transferred to a reminder. If the user is not authorized to register a recording instruction, the instruction is delayed 29 until the user either confirms or cancels that recording instruction.

Lastly, it is checked 30 if a reminder flag is set. If no reminder flag is set management of the notification is ended 31. If a reminder flag is set it is checked 32 if the notification is authorized to set a reminder. If the notification is authorized the reminder is registered 33 into the EPG memory 6 and then management of the notification is ended 31. If the notification is not authorized to register a reminder the reminder registration is delayed 34 until the user either confirms or cancels that reminder registration.

A second embodiment of the present invention will next be described.

The second embodiment is identical to the first embodiment except for the differences mentioned below.

The electronic program guide system may be incorporated in a set-top box, a mobile handset, a television receiver or a mobile display appliance.

The alert flag in the notification may be in forms closely related to SMS, such as EMS (EMS, enhanced messaging service), or other mobile messaging systems such as MMS (MMS, multimedia messaging service) or in the form of an electronic mail to the mobile phone or other email address. The alert flag in the notification may alternatively be replaced by an alert message transmitted directly to a

mobile phone of the friend or friends, e.g. by SMS, MMS, EMS or electronic mail.

When an alert message is transmitted directly to the mobile phone or other email address of the friend or friends a reminder or recording notification is always also transmitted to the electronic program guide system of the friend or friends, such that the user of that electronic program guide system need not note down nor remember reminding/recording parameters, such as TV channel, start and stop times for the recommended program.

The particular protocol for transmitting the notification may be replaced by regular electronic mail.

The prompt message waiting for delayed confirmation of recording instruction or reminder registration may be transmitted to a mobile telephone of the user, e.g. as an SMS or electronic mail. The user may then send a message back accepting or canceling the record instruction or reminder registration. A canceled record instruction for a program results in a reminder for that program.

A record instruction, both for a multimedia system of a user and for a multimedia system of a friend of the user, which is in conflict with a previous record instruction may, display a message indicating the previous record instruction and the present record instruction. The user is then given the possibility to either overwrite the previous record instruction or to cancel the present record instruction. If the user chooses to overwrite the previous record instruction it is preferably transformed into a reminder. If the user chooses to cancel the present record instruction it is preferably transformed into a reminder.

The present invention may be implemented as a computer program product stored on a computer readable storage medium, comprising computer readable program code means for causing a computer to perform the features described above.

Such a computer program product may be directly loadable into the internal memory of a digital computer comprising software code portions for performing the features described above when said product is run on a computer.

It will be obvious that the present invention may be varied in a plurality of ways. Such variations are not to be regarded as departure from the scope of the present invention. All such variations as would be obvious for a person skilled in the art are intended to be included within the scope of the present invention.